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THE RESULT OF SUPERVISED STUDY IN THE HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN, HIGH SCHOOL

JOHN E. ERICKSON

Principal of High School, Houghton, Michigan

So many inquiries have been received, asking for information concerning our plan of supervised study, that I have decided to describe the plan briefly and to give the results of two questionnaires, one from the pupils and one from the teacher. I do not contend that the results of these questionnaires have a definite scientific value, but they are of considerable interest to me, and may have some value in regard to the success or failure of supervised study. It will be apparent that there are differences of opinion among both pupils and teachers, but we must remember that there are many factors which enter into the following results that are of such a nature that we are unable to measure them.

Our plan, briefly stated, is that we divide the day into five periods of eighty minutes each. Each period is divided into two parts, the first forty minutes being devoted to the recitation and the remainder to study under the direction of the teacher. The length of the schoolday is from 8:00 A.M. to 12:00 M. and from 1:30 P.M. to 4:10 P.M. We do not pretend to do away with home study but we try to reduce it to a minimum.

During the first semester we allowed each teacher to divide the recitation and study periods according to her own discretion, but we soon found that most of the teachers used too much time for recitation. This semester we have two bells, two minutes apart, at the end of the recitation. During the two-minute interval the pupils are allowed recreation. We find this plan is more agreeable to both pupils and teachers.

The advantages of supervised study are numerous. It is almost generally conceded that high-school students do not know how to study to advantage. This is not because the grade teacher has not tried to teach them, but because she has not had an opportunity to see that her instructions were carried out. Neither is it because the high-school teacher has neglected that phase, but

because the studying has always been done in her absence. Under the old plan of assembly study periods one teacher was in charge of 150 pupils, so that if she maintained good order that was practically all that could be expected of her. She could not devote her entire time to helping pupils, and even if she could, she would not be capable of giving advice in a dozen different subjects. Under the supervised plan each teacher has her class of about twenty studying the same subject, in which she is an expert. In the smaller room with a few students there is less to distract the mind of the shiftless boy, and he will do something simply because everybody else is doing it.

The logical place for the study period is after the recitation. Under the old system the studying was done just before the recitation and was nothing more than cramming. Now the lesson is prepared twenty-four hours before it is recited.

From an administrative standpoint I am heartily in favor of supervised study, as it reduces that miserable police duty which is always so disagreeable to the average teacher. More freedom can be given the students, as they are in smaller groups. This I consider valuable, since we all despise being constantly watched.

After the supervised-study plan had been in operation for six months and the promotions made at the end of the first semester, I asked the students to answer a series of questions. I cautioned them to be honest in their report and not to let little personalities decide their answers, but rather to give the matter their careful thought. I believe they were sincere in their answers, as I did not require their names and I had no way of knowing whose paper I was reading. The following is a record of the compiled results.

Question I.—Do you consider the supervised-study plan better than the old assembly-room plan?

Group	Yes
Whole school.	77.7 per cent
Boys.	75.6 " "
Girls.	79.8 " "
Seniors.	67.2 " "
Juniors.	78.7 " "
Sophomores.	78.1 " "
Freshmen.	84.4 " "

Question II.—Do you do your best studying at home or at school?

Groups	School	Home
Whole school.....	56.5 per cent	43.5 per cent
Boys.....	63 " "	37 " "
Girls.....	51 " "	49 " "
Seniors.....	43.6 " "	56.4 " "
Juniors.....	57.3 " "	42.7 " "
Sophomores.....	60.9 " "	39.1 " "
Freshmen.....	59.7 " "	40.3 " "

Question III.—Are you doing better, about the same, or poorer work than last year?

Groups	Better	Same	Poorer
Whole school.....	39 per cent	42 per cent	19 per cent
Boys.....	45.3 " "	36 " "	18.7 " "
Girls.....	33.3 " "	44.7 " "	22 " "
Seniors.....	29 " "	47.2 " "	23.8 " "
Juniors.....	45.9 " "	42.6 " "	11.5 " "
Sophomores.....	39 " "	34.3 " "	26.7 " "

Question IV.—Do you do less, about the same, or more home study?

Groups	Less	Same	More	Decrease of Home Study
Whole school.....	49 per cent	30 per cent	21 per cent	28 per cent
Boys.....	29.4 " "	53.3 " "	17.3 " "	12.1 " "
Girls.....	29.6 " "	45.7 " "	24.7 " "	4.9 " "
Seniors.....	49.4 " "	23.4 " "	27.2 " "	22.2 " "
Juniors.....	31.2 " "	54.1 " "	14.7 " "	16.5 " "
Sophomores.....	28.2 " "	48.4 " "	23.4 " "	4.8 " "

Question V.—In what department do you think supervised study is most beneficial?

I find the different departments to rank in the following order: mathematics, science, language, history, English.

I then asked them to write why they approved or disapproved of the plan. I received many varied answers, but will quote only those that I consider representative of the majority.

Three typical ones in favor of the plan follow:

No. 1.—“I think the system a good one. That is, if it is run correctly. A pupil can study under the teacher’s supervision and ask questions on that study. In forty minutes a student should be able to master most of his lessons, which cuts off late home studying. I often had the experience of studying late at home and not understand my lesson, going to school the next day wholly unprepared. I had not been able to ask questions, when one would have cleared up the whole thing. The system is a quiet one. Formerly, every forty-five minutes, we were tramping about the building going to classes. This way it seems to be less tiresome and keeps the mind on the work more. There is less time for fooling, and the halls are in good order. . . . ”

No. 2.—“I like the supervised study periods better because I get help before leaving the classroom, if I need it, and also know what is expected of me for the next day. I take five subjects, and it is not so hard to carry them under this system as it would have been last year. There are few failures in a class if the students have been given the forty minutes to study the previous day. I notice that there is not so much time wasted this year during study periods. There is better discipline under the present system.”

No. 3.—“The new system seems to be better than the old in that a student can get more out of a subject than he could last year. When you have your teacher with you while you are studying, you can consult him as to your work if you don’t quite understand it. A person can get his studies easier than before, for he will be helped by the teacher when in serious difficulty, and a teacher knows in what manner to help the pupil.”

Two representatives of those who disapprove of the plan follow:

No. 1.—“I do not get any more time to study, because all of my teachers take all the class time, except about ten minutes, for recitation, and in that few minutes I get a hazy idea of the next day’s work, and when I get home I don’t want to go on with it and so I don’t do any more. When you have to stop trying to study one thing and put your mind on something else, it is not as good as doing it at home and not leaving one thing till it is done. We do not see the people in the other classes enough.”

No. 2.—“I don’t like the supervised-study plan because we are obliged to study or to read over the lesson for the next day so far ahead of time, whereas in the other system we could study our lessons just before we recited, and arrange them to suit ourselves. If it took two periods to prepare a Latin lesson, for instance, we could do that in school and our other studies outside. In this way we study part of each lesson in school and part at home. Too many teachers take our study time for recitation.”

In order to find out what the teachers thought of the supervised study, I asked each one to write for me his opinion. I shall quote

only from the heads of the departments as they are representative of the other teachers.

Mathematics, No. 1.—“In my work, mathematics, I like the new plan much better, because there is more time for individual work—giving hints at the critical moment while the pupil has the difficulty under consideration; making up back work; helping those who have been absent to get into line again. I can see how much time it takes each pupil to master his lesson, and am guided in the assignment of lessons. One can get hold of pupils before they are hopelessly lost, as they work in the teacher’s presence. If extra time is needed to develop an important idea, the time can be taken from the study period and the next lesson shortened. It does away with the old way of keeping pupils after school to make up work, and thus a teacher is able to plan his work so that it does not interfere with after-school activities such as literary society, band practice, etc.”

Commercial, No. 2.—“I like the supervised study plan better than the old assembly plan. During the period of recitation the efficient teacher, to receive and maintain attention on the part of the class, must be alert and have every power tense and active. To do this requires nervous energy. During the period of study the instruction is individual and does not require the intense effort. Therefore the work of the day can be done with less exhaustion to the teacher, on account of these intervals of relaxation. More and better work can be done, because each pupil studies the lesson for at least the study period. The teacher has an opportunity to give any special help needed, and the student can ask a question at the time the query arises and is fresh in the mind, and can secure the answer at the psychological moment for retaining it. Less interruption is noted on account of holidays, etc. In our bookkeeping courses from one-third to one-fourth more work has been done under the new plan. In shorthand the pupils in the dictation class have an opportunity to read their notes before going to the machine to transcribe them, so they read them readily and do not waste time in transcribing them. There are fewer failures, because the weaker students study more and the teacher has an opportunity to give them the needed assistance.”

Science, No. 3.—“As a whole, I like the plan of supervised study better than the usual plan in operation in most high schools, as it eliminates the possibility of irregular students, that is, those students who wish to recite in one science section and take laboratory work in another, or those other students who have ‘conflicts.’ Supervised study of eighty minutes or more allows time for necessary demonstration of experiments for the preparation of the next assignment. Eighty minutes permits time for visits to local industrial and scientific plants in the city.

“However, the plan of supervised study, like other plans, has its disadvantages for the science teacher in that the time for preparation of laboratory and demonstration experiments by the instructor is limited to ‘after

school,' Saturdays, and evenings. The early period from eight o'clock to twenty minutes after nine does not seem to be a good period for laboratory work. Furthermore, in general, the laboratory is not as good a study room as an 'assembly' room. Most students with five 'subjects' get too tired to do good work during the fifth study period."

Latin, No. 4.—"I am, naturally, glad to be relieved of hall duty. I find the long hours a great tax on my energy, but I confess that this may be due to the nature of my subject and the kind of supervision it entails. When I really supervise each hour in the day, I am done for by three o'clock. When I sit back, after developing a lesson, I get rested. I find it impossible to take this time from first- and second-year work, owing to the fact that I have, instead of forty-five minutes for drill, a shorter recitation period. If I take the study period for drill, then the student must study at home. I am unable to get results in Latin without some home study. Students don't, however, have to study outside so much as last year. Hence, I consider this plan a distinct gain for the student. I think that if every teacher had four of these hours the plan would be ideal. My objections, are, as you see, due to my own physical limitations and not to the plan itself."

German, No. 5.—"At first I thought, from my own personal viewpoint, that I did not like this system. The dead rush in the morning, together with the long hours, made me often wonder if there would be more than the mere shell left of me by June. Now that I have become accustomed to it, I feel more kindly toward it. Like all other systems, it has its pros and cons. It demands more of the teachers, but is an advantage to the student mass. I find it excellent in my special line of work, but have noticed that the fourth and fifth periods of the day are less easy to control, and I think this may be attributed to the fact that the four solid hours of concentration in the morning react upon the student, possibly upon teacher too. This system is excellent for the student who cannot, or will not, observe a regular study hour out of school, also for those who are willing to just squeeze through, knowing the least possible, doing the least possible. This class, I observe, does little or no work at home, and with the teacher's supervision for thirty-five minutes, must use the time in class to advantage."

History, No. 6.—"I like the present method of study, in that it gives opportunity for answering pupils' questions, allows additional reading in class, and permits the use of miscellaneous and source material at hand in the room. Under supervision, it allows instruction in method of study, including cultivation of the attention for a considerable period, and improvement of memory by studying the lesson without reading, after lesson has been read over; it affords the pupils an opportunity for 'browsing' on the material kept available in the room for this purpose, this 'browsing' having educational value when alternated with hard study; pupils are saved in many cases from carrying erroneous impressions of the work or matter found in the text over to the following day; difficult points can be cleared up when first encountered; sufficient

time to learn the lesson—the classroom work being added to home study—is available in more cases than formerly, thus permitting us to hold pupils to a higher standard of work.”

English, No. 7.—“It is of no special benefit in English work except in connection with theme writing, where the teacher is able to see the actual time spent in writing and revising.

“I cannot discuss change of duty, as I have a vacant period and do not feel the strain of five consecutive periods.

“I may be wrong, but I let the pupils do as much work for themselves as possible, feeling that they need that responsibility. I do not do my work much differently than under the old system. I can’t.”